



Homeland
Security

April 29, 2011

Todd Staples
Commissioner
Texas Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 12847
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Commissioner Staples:

Thank you for your March 24, 2011 letter regarding security along the Southwest border. We share your concern regarding the safety and security of our Southwest border communities and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is committed to continuing to work with our Mexican counterparts to address the violence and criminal activities occurring in Mexico and guard against spillover effects into the United States.

Unfortunately, there is a widespread misperception that the Southwest border is overrun by violence spilling from Mexico's ongoing drug war. The reality is that some of America's safest communities are in the Southwest border region, with crime rates in cities along the border staying steady or dropping over the past decade. In fact, the top four big cities in America with the lowest rates of violent crime are all in border states, including El Paso, TX.

Over the past two years, DHS has deployed historic levels of personnel, technology, and resources to the Southwest border. Today, the Border Patrol is better staffed than at any time in its 86-year history, having more than doubled the number of agents from approximately 10,000 in 2004 to more than 20,700 today. Under the Southwest Border Initiative, launched in March 2009, DHS has doubled the number of personnel assigned to Border Enforcement Security Task Forces; increased the number of intelligence analysts focused on cartel violence; quintupled deployments of Border Liaison Officers to work with their Mexican counterparts; begun screening 100 percent of southbound rail shipments for illegal weapons, drugs, and cash; and expanded unmanned aircraft system coverage to the entire Southwest border.

Further, the \$600 million supplemental requested by the Administration and passed by Congress last summer is enabling DHS to continue to add technology, personnel, and infrastructure to the border. These resources include 1,000 additional Border Patrol Agents; 250 new U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers at our ports of entry; and 250 new U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents focused on transnational crime. This bill also provided funds for improving our tactical communications systems; adding two new forward operating bases to improve coordination of border security activities; and additional CBP unmanned aircraft systems.

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While our work is not done, key metrics show that these border security efforts are producing significant results. Border Patrol apprehensions—a key indicator of illegal immigration—have decreased 36 percent in the past two years, and are less than one third of what they were at their peak. DHS has deported a record number of illegal immigrants and criminal aliens over the past two years. And seizures of drugs, weapons and currency have increased across the board.

At the same time, challenges remain. We are deeply concerned about drug cartel violence in Mexico. It is clear that drug organizations continue to seek to undermine the rule of law in Northern Mexico, and we must vigorously guard against potential spillover effects into the United States.

Our men and women in uniform encounter danger every day, and they put their lives on the line for our country. We owe them every tool and every resource in our arsenal so they can safely and successfully do their jobs. To fully support them and to maximize the security gains and economic opportunities in the region, we must also acknowledge the progress they have made over the past two years.

Thank you again for your letter. Should you need additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 282-9310.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Betsy Markey", with a stylized, flowing script.

Betsy Markey
Assistant Secretary